



NetSmartz Evaluation Project:
Internet Safety Training for Children and Youth Ages 6 to 18¹
Report Highlights

This report outlines the results from a recent research project into youth awareness of Internet safety and online behavior. This report is based on two visits to the NetSmartz Workshop pilot sites. The first visit occurred before the implementation of the NetSmartz program, and the follow-up visit occurred after the completion of the NetSmartz program — approximately one month later. The aim was to identify approximately 15 Club members from each age group: 6 to 7 year olds, 8 to 12 year olds, and teens at each Club.

- In all age groups, knowledge and awareness of Internet safety was disturbingly low before the program; however, youth knowledge and awareness increased significantly after participating in the NetSmartz program.
- Over two-thirds of the Club members aged 12 and younger felt that the NetSmartz program would change their behavior on the Internet.
- 86 percent of the teens felt that the I-360 program changed the way they think about the Internet and 83 percent said it has changed their behavior online and that they would now be “more careful” when using the Internet and sharing information.
- Youth also reported positively about the design of the program, in that it spoke to them not *down* to them and “made it real.”
- Teens felt the I-360 program sent a strong message of “it could happen to you” that challenged their belief that Internet anonymity was their safeguard. Of particular importance to this age group was that the software used youth their own age to teach the safety lessons that reinforced the message.
- Adults and especially parents and Club staff are ideally placed to provide training and guidance on safer Internet use.
- Internet safety is an ongoing concern that should continue to be addressed and reinforced on a regular basis and not implemented as a one-time event.
- Prior to NetSmartz, 1 in 4 youth had never received information about Internet safety issues.
- While youth might be aware of some of the elements of Internet safety, their behavior online might still be a cause for concern, even after training.
- Youth, especially older youth, were confident in their ability to avoid rules and guidelines given by their parents in order to access potentially unsafe or inappropriate material or sites.
- Younger youth were found to have a lower level of Internet safety knowledge, even after training, which highlights the need for continued training as these youth develop and are exposed to more on the world wide web

A Program of



NetSmartz Workshop
at the

National Center for Missing
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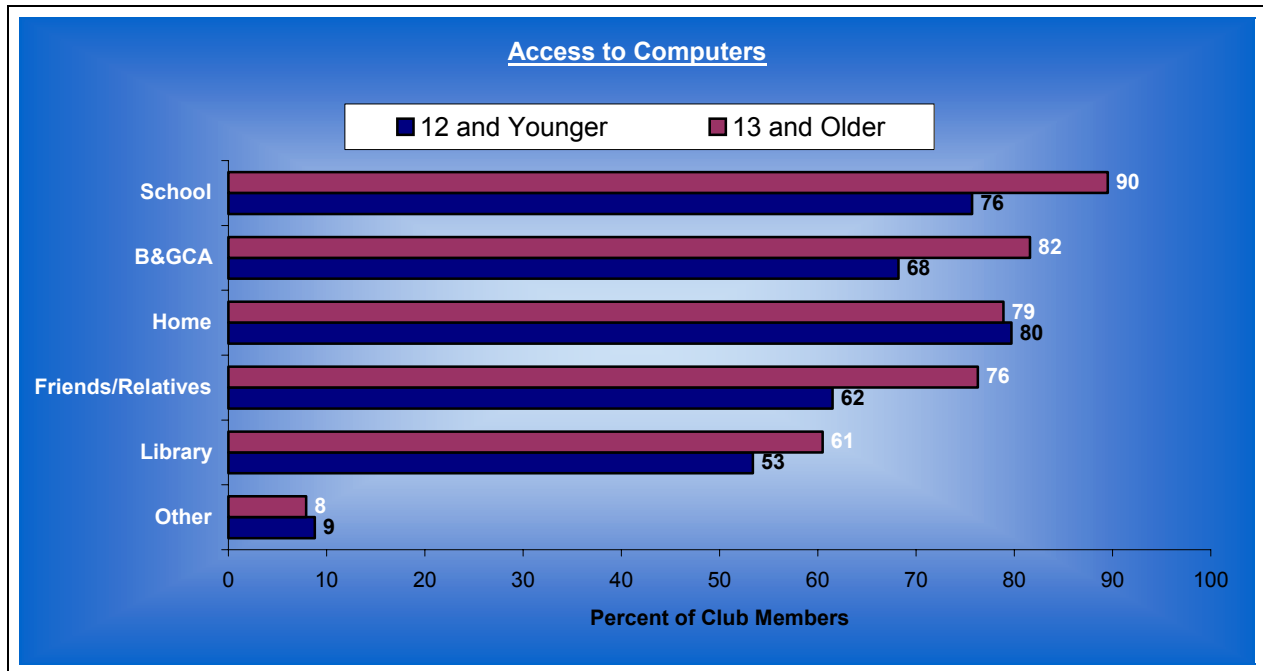
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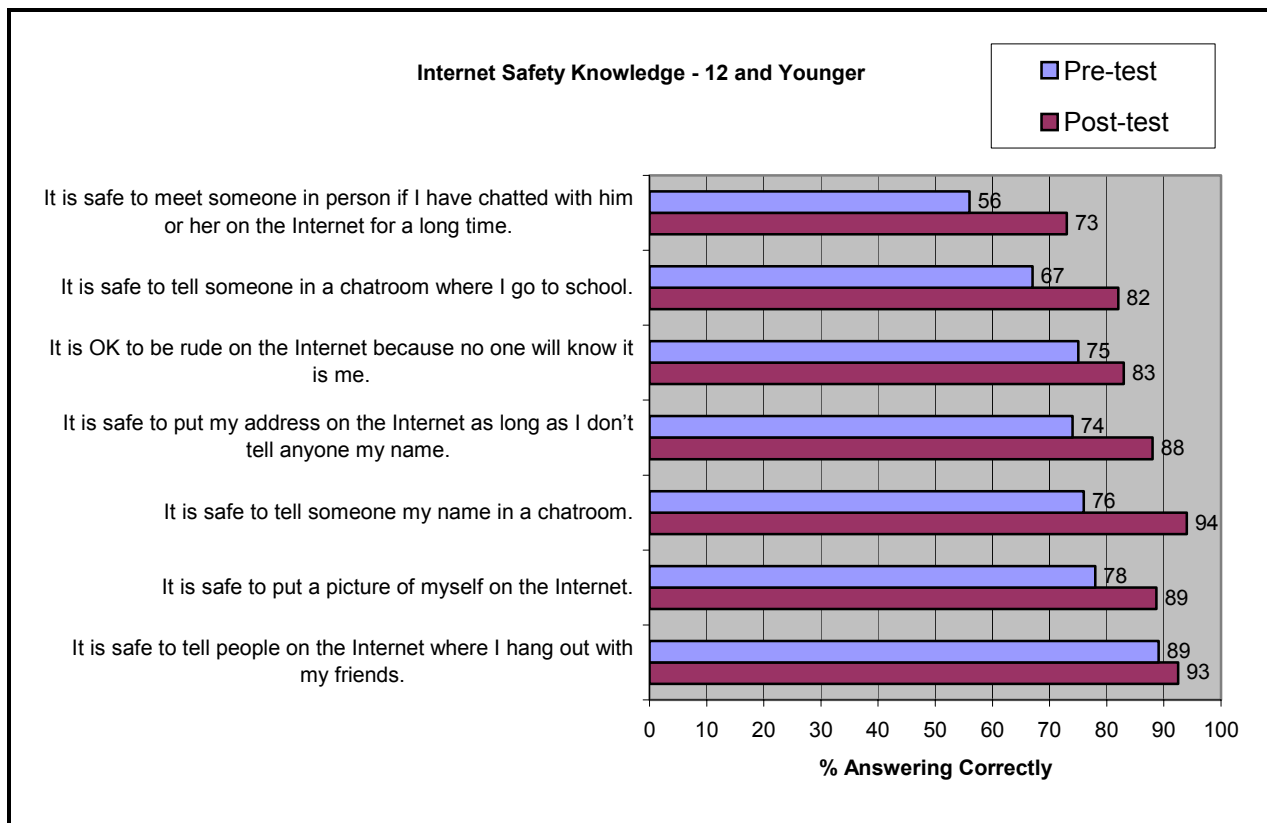
¹Branch Associates. *NetSmartz Evaluation Project: Internet Safety Training for Children and Youth Ages 6 to 18*. Atlanta, GA: Boys & Girls Clubs of America and National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2002.

REPORT CHARTS

Access to Computers

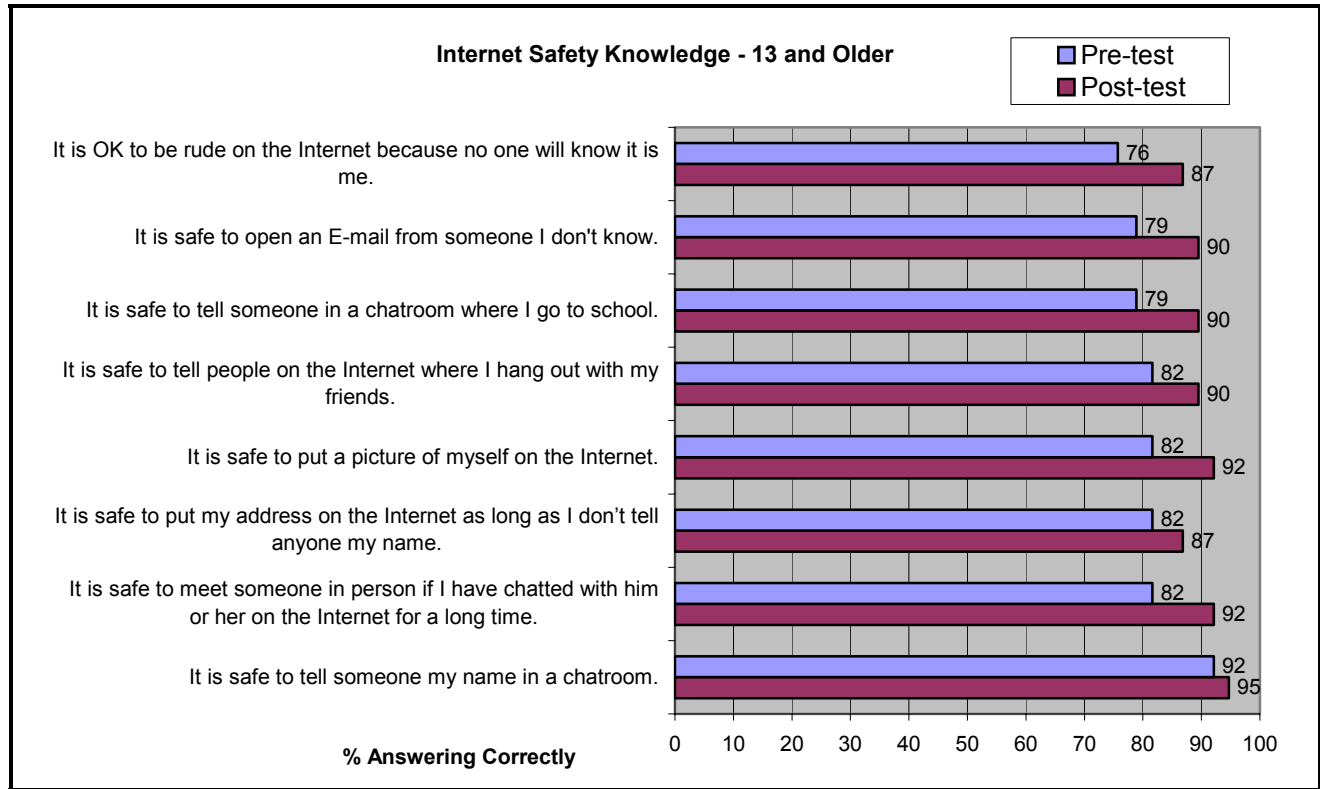


Internet Safety Knowledge – 12 and Younger Age Group



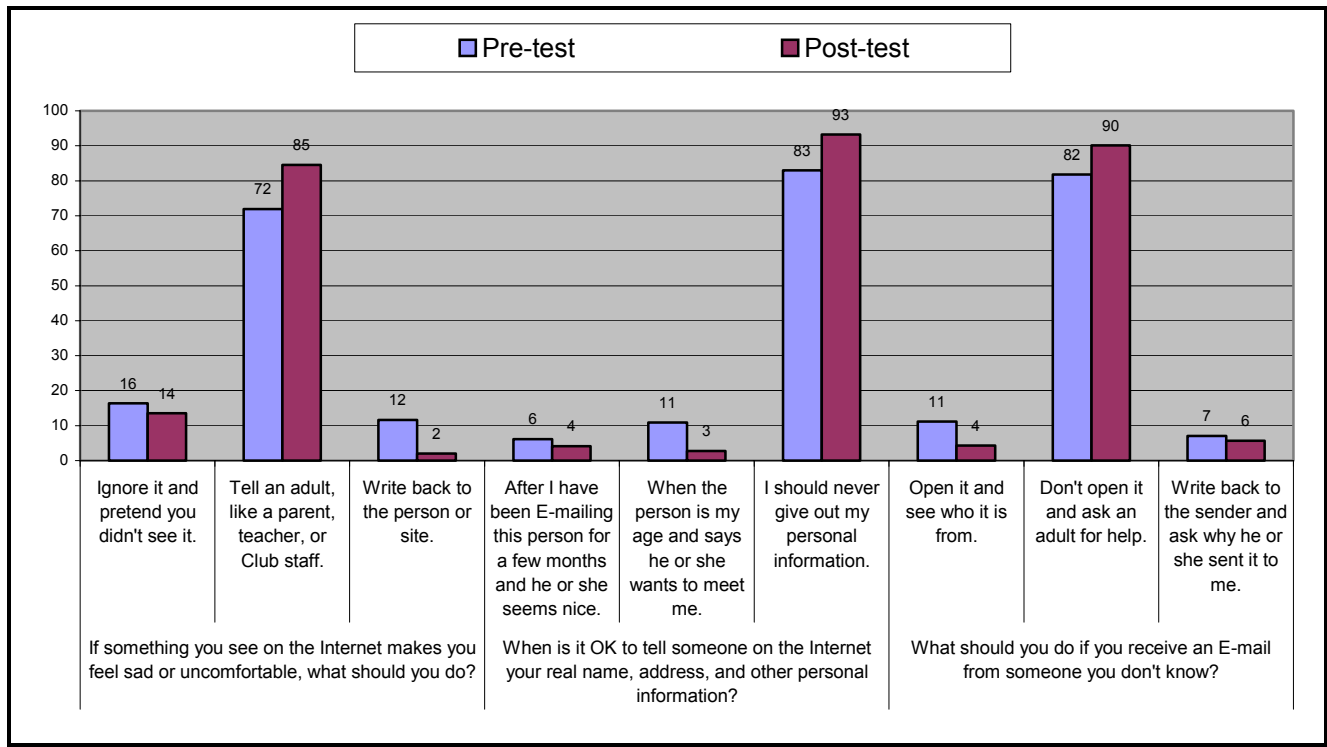
This chart shows that, regarding all questions asked, Internet safety knowledge increased from the pre-test to the post-test; however, these results also show that there are a number of behaviors that youth still consider “safe” even after participating in the NetSmartz training. These potentially unsafe behaviors are meeting people in person that they first met online, sharing information in a chatroom about where they go to school, and being rude online.

Internet Safety Knowledge – 13 and Older Age Group



The chart illustrates knowledge of the same safety behaviors for youth aged 13 and older. As you can see, at pre-test teens show a higher awareness of Internet safety than their younger counterparts; however, NetSmartz still had an impact and increased their level of Internet safety knowledge in each of the key areas. At this age the lowest level of Internet safety at pre-test related to personal conduct online, such as being rude online, with only 76 percent answering correctly. This increased to 87 percent after NetSmartz. While the teens show a higher level of Internet safety knowledge than the younger Club members, there remains room for improvement. These results suggest that a continued focus on Internet safety is needed for both age groups, especially the younger youth. This also highlights the need for parents to be especially vigilant as their younger children explore the Internet and gain more exposure to potentially dangerous situations.

Internet Behavior – 12 and Younger Age Group



As can be seen, from the results above, the majority of Club members selected the appropriate safe behavior and the number of youth selecting the appropriate response increased following their participation in the NetSmartz program. In particular the results show that, even after completing NetSmartz, 16 percent of youth would not “tell an adult” when something made them uncomfortable. This suggests that youth of this age should continue to be encouraged to share information with an adult. Further research could be done to understand what barriers prevent youth from sharing this information with adults. The results from our focus groups suggest that youth are sometimes worried that they will be blamed for receiving unsolicited mail or visiting, even mistakenly, an inappropriate site.

Internet Behavior – 13 and Older Age Group

Behavior on the Internet	Pre-Test % Agree	Post-Test % Agree
I don't have to cite the source of an article I am using for a report if I found the information online.	39	32
If someone is harassing me by sending nasty E-mails, I should just ignore him or her. The person will eventually stop.	39	34
It would take someone a long time and a lot of money to find out who I am just based on my screenname.	35	21
Victims of Internet crimes are almost always females.	32	34
It is OK to play racist Internet games as long as I don't treat people that way in real life. It is just a game.	32	24
The Internet is a great place for me to express my anger and opinions because no one knows who I am on the Internet.	27	16
I feel more comfortable talking to people online than in person.	27	32
What I do on the Internet doesn't really matter because, once I log off, no one will be able to find me.	24	13
As long as I have online friends, there is no need for me to go outside and play with other friends.	8	10

The results, as detailed in the table above, found that after completing the I-360 program more teens recognized the need to cite information they found online and that ignoring harassers would not necessarily solve the problem. Teens were also more aware that other people could identify them relatively quickly and easily through information they shared online. While there appeared to be a consensus among teens that “online” friends and relationships should not replace those that they have in real life, a significant number (approximately 30 percent) felt more comfortable talking to people online than in person. These results reflect those of the focus groups, where a number of teens felt that the Internet provided them with an opportunity to express themselves in ways they might not otherwise in person.